



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

February 7, 2023

The Honorable Donovan Dela Cruz
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
415 S Beretania St State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813-2425

RE: Hearing Aid Coverage; SB 609

Dear Senator Dela Cruz:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to express support for SB 609, which requires individual and group accident and health or sickness policies, contracts, plans, or agreements issued or renewed in Hawaii on or after January 1, 2024, to cover the cost of both conventional and bone conduction hearing aids.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 223,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 590 ASHA members reside in Hawaii.¹

ASHA supports SB 609, which also specifies that hearing aid purchases are subject to a minimum benefit of \$1,500 per hearing-impaired ear every 36 months.

SB 609 provides critical support for reducing instances of untreated hearing loss. Studies have linked untreated hearing loss to many social and economic factors, including depression, withdrawal from social situations, reduced alertness and increased risk to personal safety, impaired memory and ability to learn new tasks, reduced job performance and earning potential, and diminished psychological and overall health.² Approximately 15% of school-age children have some degree of hearing loss in one or both ears, with 5.4% (or about 1 in 20) having less severe or unilateral hearing loss.³ Academic achievement and social functioning are significantly impacted by even a mild to moderate hearing loss, which may bring about difficulty in learning and building important interpersonal skills necessary to healthy self-esteem. In fact, over one-third of children with less severe or unilateral hearing loss are projected to fail at least one grade or will require additional educational support, which is estimated to cost the educational system over \$5.5 billion.⁴

Thank you for helping to ensure that the citizens of Hawaii have access to hearing aids, which will help them participate in daily living activities and improve their ability to engage in social interaction. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eileen Crowe, ASHA's director, state association relations, at ecrowe@asha.org.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Augustine, PhD, CCC-SLP
2023 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022). *Hawaii* [Quick Facts].

<https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/state-fliers/hawaii-state-flyer.pdf>

² Emmett, S. D., & Francis, H. W. (2015). The Socioeconomic Impact of Hearing Loss in U.S. Adults. *36*(3), 545–550. doi: [10.1097/MAO.0000000000000562](https://doi.org/10.1097/MAO.0000000000000562).

³ Niskar, A.S., Kieszak, S.M., Holmes, A., Esteban, E, Rubin, C., & Brody, D.J. (1998). *Prevalence of Hearing Loss Among Children 6 to 19 Years of Age: The Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey*. *JAMA*, *279*(14),1071–1075. doi:10.1001/jama.279.14.1071.

⁴ Tharpe, A. M. (2008). *Unilateral and mild bilateral hearing loss in children: past and current perspectives*. *Trends in Amplification*, *12*(1), 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1084713807304668>.